Letter from Taizé

December 2003 – January 2004 Bimonthly 0,50 euro 6

Meister Francke, 15th century, Kunsthalle Hamburg

Holy Spirit, on the day of Christmas,
as the morning star rises in our hearts,
you open a way within us which leads
from darkness towards the brightness
of your presence.

Prayer by Brother Roger

PROCESSED
NOV 24 2003
GTU LIBRARY

THE MEETING OF YOUNG ADULTS 2003/2004 IN HAMBURG

"What leads towards joy"

The City of Hamburg, with its huge port and innumerable bridges, is a good symbol of openness to the world and of chances to build connections, to communicate.

This is what the people working to prepare the European Meeting there have been finding out over the last few months. At the heart of these preparations, the brothers in Hamburg welcome everyone to a daily prayer in a church in the town centre. The visits being made spread outwards over the whole region, sometimes to places an hour away from the centre of this flat region, strewn with windmills dancing in the wind, in order to meet the communities making up the three hundred parishes who will be welcoming the participants.

The place where the preparations are being co-ordinated is symbolic: it is surrounded by a vast building site where foundations are being dug, just at the foot of the Hertz Tower, Hamburg's television tower, symbol of communication; opposite are the halls where everyone will gather for the prayers; and just beside it is a prison and also a botanical garden full of all sorts of flowers, fountains, and children's games. Helping such different domains to live together, building bridges between them, overcoming barriers: this will be one of the tasks of the European Meeting, both in the life of each person and between people.

The people preparing the Meeting are very glad to be supported so clearly by Church leaders. The Lutheran and Catholic bishops have written a letter together, in which they say that the young people, as they are welcomed, will "experience the living strength of the Christian faith. In this way they will give a sign of hope and of encouragement in a world where many people are looking for a meaning in life to sustain them. They will be celebrating together a feast of the faith and confronting, with God's guidance, questions that are urgent for the future of humanity. And they will be seeking in their everyday lives to take little steps forward towards justice and peace."

In a pastoral letter, the Catholic Bishop of Hamburg highlights another aspect of the Meeting: "'Leave your sadness behind; let God lead you to joy.' Brother Roger quotes these words from the Bible in his letter *A God who simply loves.* The Taizé Meeting can lead us in this direction. Meeting young people from all over the world who are on a pilgrim way of trust at Hamburg can lead to joy. Listening together and responding to the Word of God can lead to joy. The experience that before God we are united beyond the barriers that divide us can again lead us to joy."

Mother Teresa knew how to love and say it with her life

We live in a world where light and darkness coexist. Through the life she lived, Mother Teresa invited people to choose light. In this way she opened a road to holiness for many others. So we were a very large crowd, in Saint Peter's Square in Rome on 19 October, rejoicing that Pope John Paul II, by declaring her blessed, proposes her example to believers.

Mother Teresa made words written by Saint Augustine four centuries after Christ comprehensible to us: "Love and say it with your life." Trust in God becomes credible and is communicated above all when it is lived out.

I had many opportunities to converse with Mother Teresa. Often it was possible to discern in her reflections of the holiness of Christ.

In the summer of 1976 she came to Taizé. Our hill was full of young people from many different countries. That day we wrote a prayer together: "O God, Father of every human being, you ask us all to bring love where the poor are humiliated, reconciliation where human beings are divided, joy where the Church is shaken. You open this road for us so that we may be ferments of communion throughout the entire human family."

That same year, a few of my brothers and I went to live for a time with the very poor in Calcutta. We were staying near her home in a lower-class district, noisy, full of children, where mostly Muslims lived. We were offered hospitality by a Christian family whose home was in front of an intersection of some small streets, with shops and simple workshops.

Mother Teresa often came to pray with us. In the afternoon, she sometimes asked me to go with her to visit lepers who had nothing to look forward to but death. She tried to calm their worries.

Sometimes she could take initiatives that were quiet spontaneous. One day, on the way back from visiting the lepers, she said to me in the car, "I have something to ask you. Say yes!" Before giving my reply, I tried to find out more about what she wanted, but she would only repeat, "Say yes!" Finally she explained, "Tell me that from now on you will wear your white robe all day long; this sign is so necessary in the situations of today." "Yes," I answered, "I will speak to my brothers about this and I will wear it as often as possible." So she had the sisters make a white robe for me and insisted on sewing part of it herself.

She was particularly attentive to children. She proposed that I and one of my brothers, who was a doctor, go to the home for abandoned children every morning, to take care of those who were most ill. From the first day I discovered a little girl, four months old. I was told that she did not have enough strength to resist the viruses of the winter. And Mother Teresa proposed, "Take her with you to Taizé; you will be able to take care of her there."

In the plane returning to France, the little girl, named Marie, was not well. When we arrived in Taizé, she began to gurgle like a happy baby for the first time. The first weeks, she often slept in my arms while I worked. Slowly her strength returned. Then she went to live in the village, in a house close to ours. My sister Genevieve, who years before in Taizé had taken in children and raised them as her own, welcomed her to her home. When she was baptized I became her godfather and I love her like a father.

Several years later, Mother Teresa came back to Taizé one Sunday in the autumn. During the prayer, together we expressed a concern that remains true today: "In Calcutta, there are visible homes for the dying. But in many parts of the world, many young people are in invisible homes for the dying. They are marked by broken relationships or by worry for their future. Separations have wounded in them the innocence of childhood or adolescence. In some this leads to disenchantment: what is the good of existing; does life still have any meaning?"

In 1984, Mother Teresa and I were invited by the Holy See for the opening of the first World Youth Day in Rome. We had to speak in the Coliseum, one after the other. Little Marie, who was eight years old, was there too. The wind of early spring was blowing so strongly that I had to hold her tightly wrapped in her cape so that she would not be pierced by the cold. She was very quiet. With her keen and attentive mind, she wanted to listen to everything.

Later on, we were invited once again to lead a prayer for World Youth Day, this time in Denver, in the United States. But Mother Teresa was already ill. When I arrived, I learned that she had had to cancel her trip. She sent me a letter to tell me: "Let's write a fourth book together!"

Two of my brothers and I went to Calcutta in order to take part in Mother Teresa's funeral. We wished to thank God for her gift of her life, and to sing with her sisters in the spirit of praise. Next to her body, I remembered how we had in common this conviction: a communion in God stimulates us to alleviate human suffering on earth. Yes, when we soothe the trials of others, we encounter Christ. Does he not say it himself: "Whatever you do for the least, you do for me, Christ."

Brother Roger of Taizé

A PRAYER to accompany the meeting in Hamburg

Songs :

Da pacem in diebus *or*
Laudate omnes gentes

Alleluia, slava tiebie Bože

Psalm 9,

either sung or read, with "Alleluia" between each verse

I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart, I will tell all the wonders you have done; I will exult and rejoice, O God, I will sing and praise your name. (vv. 2-3)

May the Lord be a stronghold for the oppressed, a refuge to support the poor. (v. 10)

All who know you, Lord, have trust in you; you do not abandon those who seek you. (v. 11)

Sing praise to the Lord in Zion, proclaim all God's wonderful deeds; God remembers our cries and our pain. (vv. 12-13)

Have mercy, Lord, see my distress; bring me back from the gates of death that I may sing your praises and shout for joy that you have saved me. (vv. 14-15)

Bible reading: *Luke 4:16-21*

When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Song:

Jesu redemptor *or*
Mon âme se repose

Silence

Intercessory prayer

sung or read with "Kyrie eleison" between each intention

For those who are far from home, immigrants, exiles, refugees, Lord, we pray.

For those who are going through trials, who need help and compassion, Lord, we pray.

For all of us gathered here, that we may remain attentive to those entrusted to us, Lord, we pray.

That we may learn to share more fairly the resources of our planet among all, Lord, we pray.

That a sense of wonder at the beauty of creation may remain alive in us, Lord, we pray.

That we may find light and courage in the mystery of communion that is the Church, Lord, we pray.

Our Father

Song:

Nada te turbe *or*
Tu sei sorgente viva

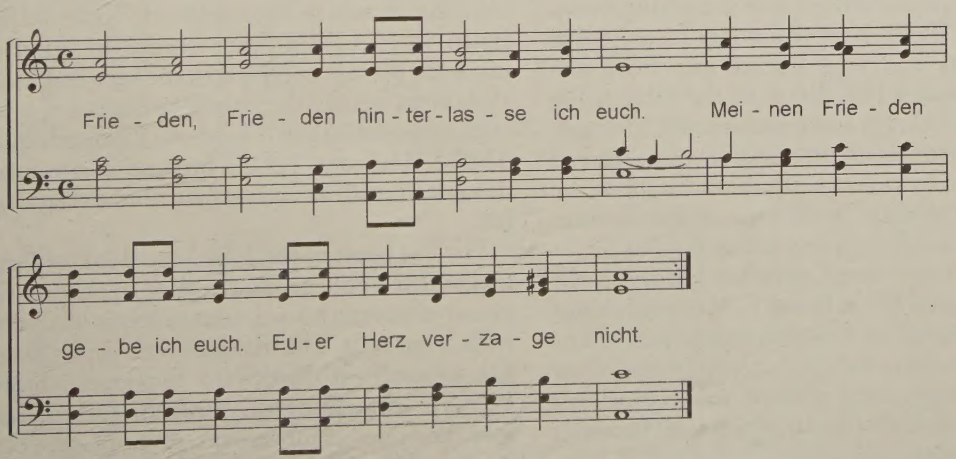
Prayer *of Brother Roger :*

Holy Spirit, mysterious presence, you sound the depths of our being and you see there a longing. You know our desire: to transmit to others your compassion through an infinite goodness of heart.

Songs:

Cantate Domino canticum novum

Frieden, Frieden *or*
Bless the Lord



(Je vous laisse ma paix, je vous donne ma paix. Que votre cœur ne se trouble pas. / My peace I leave, my peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled. / Vi lascio la pace, vi dò la mia pace. Non sia turbato il vostro cuore. / La paz os dejo, mi paz os doy. No se turbe vuestro corazón. / Pokój zostawiam wam, pokój mój daje wam. Niech sie nie trwozy serce wasze.)

© Ateliers et Presses de Taizé Musique: Taizé

SUFFERING

What does the Bible tell us about the suffering of the innocent?

The objection of Ivan Karamazov, in the well-known novel by Dostoyevsky, remains for many people the greatest obstacle to faith in a God of love. Can we still trust in God in a world where children are tortured? If God is good, how can he permit the innocent to suffer?

A witness to the spiritual searching of human beings down through the ages, the Bible itself attempts to come to grips with this question. The psalms depict the anguished perplexity of the faithful when confronted by the happiness of the wicked and the misfortune of the just. "Was it useless to have kept my own heart clean, to have washed my hands in innocence, when I was under a hail of blows all day long, and punished every morning?... I cry to you, Lord, every morning my prayer comes before you; why do you rebuff me, turn your face away from me?" (Psalm 73:13-14; 88:13-14). It becomes more and more obvious that the age-old explanation linking affliction and sin does not always work; there exist countless examples where suffering is not merely the well-deserved consequence of an existence far from God.

At the heart of the Hebrew Scriptures, the figure of Job is the living symbol of this enigma. An upright and religious man, overwhelmed by sorrows, Job refuses to deny either his claims to innocence or his relationship with the Lord. Holding firm to these two poles at all costs, Job sees his dispute with the Lord lead to a startling new insight. It is not an intellectual explanation, still less a justification of the necessity of suffering—an aberration which God could never in fact offer—but rather the revelation of a context in which everything changes colour. Job comes to the realization that the apparent solution which blames God for affliction leads to a dead end, and is in fact the greatest mistake it is possible to make. Once this has been clearly sensed, the road lies open for a truer vision of things.

And in fact, this vision was there from the beginning of the biblical revelation. The first innocent man we encounter in the pages of the Bible is Abel, unjustly murdered by his brother Cain. The author of the book of Genesis writes these stupefying words about this act: "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!" (Genesis 4:10). Blood in the Bible is life (see Leviticus 17:11,14) and paradoxically, life snuffed out by human wickedness finds a voice. Instead of being silenced by violence, the desire for life in the victim's heart is liberated by his wounded innocence. His cry reaches God's ears and causes God to act.

This same process enters salvation history in the story of the Exodus. What brings God to earth is not some feat of heroism or devotion on the part of human beings, but rather the cry that springs from their oppression. The groaning of slaves sets in motion a vast movement of liberation by which God becomes present (see Exodus 2:23-25).

A further step is taken by the prophets of Israel. They experience in their very flesh the rejection of God, the first Innocent, by a people that wants to have full control over its own fate. So we find Hosea, for example, forced to put up patiently with betrayal by his beloved, a living image of God's faithfulness to his unfaithful people. Or Jeremiah, excluded and persecuted by his fellows, "a man of strife and dissension for the whole country," condemned to remain alone with his "incurable wound" (Jeremiah 15:10,17-18). It will take time to realize that these men, through their own pain at not being listened to and understood, offer us in fact a glimpse of God's own heart.

If the life of the prophets reveals that the suffering of the innocent does not only incite God to act in order to restore justice, but in addition is the privileged locus where human beings can enter the divine mystery, then a mysterious figure that we meet in chapters 40-55 of the book of Isaiah makes this explicit. This figure is described as the lowest of the low, a being who attracts all the malice of others like a magnet in order to transmute it into suffering (see Isaiah 53). But this man who was despised by all and apparently rejected by God is in fact God's Servant, in other words someone who makes the divine plan of salvation a reality on earth. If "it was the Lord's good pleasure to crush him with pain," (Isaiah 53:10), that was in order to raise him up in the sight of all, so that all might see in him God at work reconciling to himself those who reject him by taking upon himself the consequences of their unfaithfulness.

Does the life of Jesus tell us anything more?

It was not by chance that the first Christians kept returning to these chapters of Isaiah when they were combing the Scriptures for insights concerning the fate of their master Jesus. Already his acts of healing had witnessed to his willingness to take upon himself the pain of others out of love (see Matthew 8:16-17). But it was above all the way he faced an atrocious death that broke the infernal cycle of evil. The condemnation of an innocent man who responded with forgiveness (see Luke 23:47,34) enabled God's intention of bringing justice to the multitude to be fulfilled (see Isaiah 53:10-11). In other words, the suffering of an innocent person, accepted to the very end, brought to all human beings the lightheartedness of a rediscovered innocence. Jesus' blood was "more eloquent than Abel's" (Hebrews 12:24) because it obtained God's descent to earth as an inexhaustible wellspring of new life.

The last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, makes this whole process explicit in chapter 6, a great vision of human history seen in terms of a book sealed with seven seals. The first four seals depict humankind left to itself—a downward movement heading inexorably towards death. With the fifth seal we enter into the opposite movement, that of God's coming to save. And it begins with the cry of "the souls of all the

JANUARY

Holy Spirit, enable us to bring peace where there are oppositions, and to allow a reflection of God's compassion to become visible by the lives we lead. Yes, show us how to love and to say it with our life.

1 Thu 1 Co 13:8-13
Paul writes: These three things remain: Faith, hope and love. And the greatest of them is love.

2 Fri Rv 21:22-27
The nations will walk in the light of Christ, and the kings of the earth will bring their treasure to the city of God.

3 Sat Hab 3:18-19
I shall rejoice in the Lord, I shall exult in God my saviour.

4 SUN Jn 1:1-18
The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

5 Mon Jn 1:9-12
The Word was the true light that gives light to everyone. To all those who accepted him he gave the right to become children of God.

6 Tue Mt 2:1-12
EPIPHANY
When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.

7 Wed Ac 10:34-43
Peter said: God sent his word, and announced the good news of peace through Jesus Christ; he is the Lord of all.

8 Thu 1 P 1:22-25
Peter writes: You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

9 Fri 2 Th 2:16-3:5
May our Lord Jesus Christ, and God our Father who has given us his love and, through his grace, such ceaseless encouragement and sure hope, encourage and strengthen you in every good word and deed.

10 Sat Ga 4:1-7
God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we might be adopted as God's children.

11 SUN Lk 3:15-22
The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

12 Mon Is 40:6-8
Isaiah said: Grass withers and flowers fade, but the word of our God will stand forever.

13 Tue Ph 2:12-18
Paul writes: God works in you to will and act according to his good purpose so that you may become children of God with your light shining out like stars in the midst of the world.

14 Wed Jn 3:22-36
The one whom God has sent, Jesus Christ, speaks God's own words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit.

15 Thu Is 60:1-7
Darkness covers the earth, but upon you the Lord is rising and his glory can be seen on you.

16 Fri 1 P 4:7-11
Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.

17 Sat Lk 4:14-30
The Lord has sent me to bring good news to the poor and to proclaim freedom to those in captivity.

18 SUN 1 Co 12:3-13
There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Spirit; there are different ways of serving, but it is the same Lord; there are many forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all.

19 Mon Ws 11:21-26
You are merciful to all, Lord, because you are almighty. You love everything that exists.

20 Tue Ga 6:7-10
Let us not become tired of doing good. The harvest will come in good time if we persevere.

21 Wed Pr 4:18-27
The path of the upright is like the light of dawn, whose brightness increases to the full light of day.

22 Thu Mt 19:23-30
In astonishment at Jesus' words, the disciples asked him, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "By human resources this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

23 Fri Jn 8:31-36
Jesus said: Everyone who commits sin is a slave. Now a slave has no permanent place in the household, but a son belongs to it for ever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free.

24 Sat Lk 18:9-14
In a parable, Jesus said that the one who prayed saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner", went home forgiven.

25 SUN Lk 4:14-21
Jesus read out these words of Isaiah the prophet: The Spirit of the Lord is on me. God has sent me to announce good news to the afflicted, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed.

26 Mon Lm 3:54-57
You came near when I called you, Lord, and you said, "Do not be afraid."

27 Tue 1 Tm 1:12-17
Paul writes: I am thankful to Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has strengthened me and judged me trustworthy, by calling me to his service.

28 Wed Jn 1:29-34
John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him and said: There is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

29 Thu Lk 5:27-32
Jesus noticed a tax collector called Matthew sitting at the tax office and he said to him, "Follow me." And, leaving everything, Matthew got up and followed him.

30 Fri Si 4:1-10
Deliver the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor and you will be like a child of the Most High who will love you more than your own mother does.

31 Sat 1 Jn 4:16-21
This is the command Christ gave us: whoever loves God must also love their brother and sister.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

1 SUN 1 Co 12:31—13:13 Paul writes: Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known.

2 Mon Lk 2:22-38 PRESENTATION OF THE LORD When Simeon saw the child Jesus, he praised God and said: Now, Lord, you can let your servant depart in peace. For my eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared for all people to see.

3 Tue Ps 142 I cry out to you, Lord; set me free from prison that I may praise your name.

4 Wed Gn 12:1-5 The Lord said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your kinsfolk and your father's house for the land I will show you." And Abraham set out, as the Lord had told him.

5 Thu Ac 17:22-28 In God we live and move and have our being.

6 Fri Dn 3:51-90 Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart, praise and glorify him forever! For God has rescued us from the hand of death.

7 Sat Mt 13:1-23 In a parable, Jesus said: The seed which was sown in good soil is like someone who hears the Word and understands it; that person bears fruit.

8 SUN Lk 5:1-11 Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." "Master," Simon replied, "we have worked hard all night long without catching anything, but because you say so I will let down the nets."

9 Mon Is 2:2-5 Isaiah said: The peoples of the earth will say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord so that he may teach us his ways."

10 Tue Zc 8:16-19 The Lord says to his people: Within your gates render judgments that are true and make for peace. Yes, love truth and peace.

11 Wed 1 Co 1:4-9 You are eagerly waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will continue to give you strength to the very end.

12 Thu Dn 2:19-23 Daniel said: May God be blessed for ever and ever. The Lord reveals depths and mysteries, and light dwells with him.

13 Fri Ep 6:18-20 Pray in the Spirit at all times. Never tire of praying for all God's people.

14 Sat Lk 12:22-32 Jesus said to his disciples: Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.

15 SUN Lk 6:20-23 Looking at his disciples, Jesus said: Happy are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours.

16 Mon Ph 2:1-11 Paul writes: Be one in love, one in heart and one in mind; do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit.

17 Tue 1 Co 15:54-58 Stand firm, let nothing shake you, be full of energy for the work of God, knowing that in the Lord nothing of your labour is wasted.

18 Wed Ps 40 I waited for the Lord and he heard my cry. He put a fresh song in my mouth: a hymn of praise to our God.

19 Thu Mt 9:35—10:8 At the sight of the crowds Jesus was moved to compassion, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

20 Fri 1 Co 1:10-13 May there be no divisions among you. Be closely united in mind and thought.

21 Sat Lk 18:18-23 Jesus told someone: You lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.

22 SUN Lk 6:36-38 Jesus said: Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge and you will not be judged.

23 Mon Mt 6:25-34 Jesus said: Do not worry about your life. Seek first God's kingdom and his saving justice and all other things will be given to you as well.

24 Tue Jn 10:1-10 Jesus said: I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: they will go in and out, and will find pasture.

25 Wed 2 Co 5:20—6:2 ASH WEDNESDAY Paul writes: We are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were making his appeal through us. And we implore you in the name of Christ: be reconciled to God. Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

26 Thu Mk 8:27-35 Jesus taught his disciples: The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously and to be rejected by the chief priests and scribes, to be put to death, and after three days to rise again.

27 Fri Mt 19:27-29 Jesus said: Anyone who leaves everything for my sake will receive much more and will inherit eternal life.

28 Sat Mk 1:12-15 After being tempted in the desert, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God. "The time has come," he said, "the kingdom of God is at hand. Turn to God and believe in the good news of the Gospel."

29 SUN Lk 4:1-13 Jesus said to the tempter, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, him alone must you serve.'"

FEBRUARY

You love us, O God, and however poor our prayer is, we seek you with trust. Your love makes its way through our hesitations, and even our doubts.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JOHANNINE HOURS

January 2004: Genesis 37:22,31-35

When Joseph's brothers plot to kill him, one of them, Reuben, tries to save Joseph. He is Jacob's oldest son, the brother who is responsible, the one who has to respond to his father for Joseph.

When Jacob learns from his sons their false story about Joseph's death, he is inconsolable. All the evil done to Joseph now falls on his head. That recalls a situation from the distant past. Jacob himself was the son who lied to his father Isaac. To receive his father's blessing instead of his brother, he used the garments of his older brother Esau (Genesis 27). His father Isaac suffered, because he had a great love for Esau. Now Jacob is the one who is deceived by his own sons with the garment of his favorite, Joseph.

An act has consequences, even if its author is unaware of them when he is accomplishing it. Because Reuben keeps Joseph from being killed, Joseph will remain alive. And this positive act of Reuben's will not only save Joseph at that moment: by that act, Reuben saves as well the one who, much later in Egypt, will save Reuben himself, along with Jacob and the whole family! A good act bears fruit, even one which is timid and imperfect like Reuben's, whose main intention was to keep his place as the oldest son, the one responsible.

Jacob's lie to his father Isaac is repeated exactly in the same proportion for Jacob himself, whereas Reuben's good act bears fruit which is much greater. The consequences of good and bad actions thus differ considerably. Evil is sterile, and can only reproduce the same evil. There is no imagination, no creativity in evil! A good act, on the other hand, is like a little seed. It multiplies the good it contains, in order to bear much fruit (Mark 4:8). This good cannot be stifled.

- Do I know any examples of a good act, even an imperfect one, which bore much fruit?
- Conquer evil through good (Romans 12:21): how is this shown in the story of Joseph, and in my own life?

February 2004: Genesis 39:20 – 40:7

Joseph stayed in prison (39,20): could he fall any lower? First he lost his tunic as a son to his brothers, and then his tunic as a slave at the hands of his master Potiphar's wife (39:12). Joseph seems to be in a situation with no way out. As a slave he has no rights. It would not be surprising if Joseph rejected his faith in God and withdrew into feeling sorry for himself.

The Lord was with Joseph (39:2,21,23): this refrain is repeated, even if Joseph's situation becomes gloomy and hopeless. And yet the Lord's presence is not a guarantee that his life will have no problems. Otherwise Joseph would have surely complained, "Why did God permit this to happen?" On the contrary, the Lord's presence becomes for him a source of conduct in all situations. That is why Joseph accepts his situation, even in prison. He tries to do his best there; he does not become bitter. The guardian even entrusts the other prisoners to him. A situation like that can become creative.

The turning point for Joseph, his movement upward, begins right there in prison, at the lowest point, where the Lord descended with him. We see Joseph concerned for the well-being of his fellow prisoners. Joseph has changed: he no longer thinks he is a god (37:9); he creates with God. The turning point begins one morning with a question which is apparently trivial: "Why do you look so gloomy today?" (40:7). Just as the Lord had compassion on Joseph, Joseph is sensitive to the problems of others (Luke 6:36). Two of his fellow prisoners slept poorly. When Joseph sees their faces early in the morning, he understands by their expressions that they have a deeper problem. He takes an interest in them, and so they can express to Joseph what worried them during the night. That will lead to Joseph's liberation from prison (41:7) and a life not just of service to his fellow prisoners, but to an entire people concerned that they will starve (41:55).

- In what situations am I called to be a creator with God?
- How does compassion manifest itself in my day-to-day life?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Canada : Three Meetings with a Taizé Brother in 2004 :

Québec, Laval University,
30 January -1 February
Contact:
chantal.chartrand@diocesequebec.qc.ca

Ottawa, St. Paul's University, 6-8 February
Contact: mchevalier@ecclesia-ottawa.org

Montréal : 13-15 Februay
Contact: Marie-Agnès Pueyo,
magirodias@hotmail.com ; tel. 514 733 2824

Toronto : 20 February: All Saints,
1415 Royal York Road – Etobicoke
21 February: Church of the Redeemer,
162 Bloor St. West
Contact: rosina.ego-aguirre@sympatico.ca
Tel: 905 686 1670

> 4 people who had been killed…" (Revelation 6:9-11). We should not limit this group to Christian martyrs; it evokes rather "the blood of every innocent person that has been shed on earth, from the blood of Abel the just" (Matthew 23:35; see Revelation 18:24). In God, the blood of the innocent receives an effective power that counteracts the destructive effects of violence. Their apparent defeat inaugurates a movement of liberation that culminates in the cross of Christ.

This is what is shown in the opening of the next seal, which leads to "the great Day of the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:17). In the Bible, God's "wrath" or "anger" is a technical term that describes the divine response to sin in order to restore justice that has been flouted. Here, it refers to the act by which Jesus takes all human sinfulness upon himself by undergoing its consequences to the very end, in his own body (see 1 Peter 2:21-24).

By giving his life to the end, then, Jesus shares the fate of all the innocent victims of inhumanity and in this way ensures that their torment has not been in vain. He carries their suffering within his own relationship with the One he calls *abba* and, since the Father always hears him (see Jean 11:42), we have the guarantee that this suffering is not wasted. It brings about the disappearance of the old world order marked by injustice, and the appearance of "new heavens and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). This is the definitive response, because it is a lived one, to Ivan Karamazov and to Job. Far from tolerating even for a single moment the suffering of the innocent, in his beloved Son God drinks to the dregs that bitter cup with them and, in so doing, transforms it into a cup of blessing for all.

Cambodia

New Christian Communities

A brother describes his recent visit to Cambodia, with its new Christian communities and an experience of contemplative prayer in a village on the Mekong River:

"You'll be here for the election!" This was the greeting when I arrived in Phnom Penh. The friends meeting me at the airport seemed glad to know I could be there during what for the people of Cambodia was an anxious time. The general election campaign was in full swing, the fourth since democracy was introduced. The previous elections had not always passed off calmly and memories of the still recent past can resurface very easily.

For three weeks, I travelled through a large part of the country. The flags of the different political parties could be seen everywhere, and my different chauffeurs talked to me about the political situation. Visiting new communities was a bit like reading the Acts of the Apostles: people studying catechism, people finding their way, scattered Christians who meet together in small communities.

In Phnom Penh, there was a beautiful evening at Psar Toit Church with Christians of different denominations. As in other places, the prayer was preceded by the reading of the Letter for 2003, *A God Who Simply Loves*, followed by a time of silence and sharing in small groups. The songs are well known since they are used in Sunday celebrations, but for some the silence and the sobriety in which everything takes place came as a discovery.

The meetings followed a daily rhythm, each day in a different place. Although the program was the same each time, everything seemed different in each place because the situations were so different. Eleven kilometres from Phnom Penh, in an area mostly Vietnamese, there is a community started in a neighbourhood where there is a lot of prostitution. Then in Kompot, with one of the young Khmer priests and a dozen high school students (although they are 21 to 22 years old), then next day on to Kompong Som, called also Sihanoukville. There, the meeting took place at the Don Bosco Centre with young people from the town and their families. It was beautiful to see mothers and children arriving in small groups, one after the other; as if the word had been passed round and they had decided to come. The church at Kompong Som was built before the Pol Pot period and during that time it was used as a prison. A sister from a religious community died there.

For the journey to Siem Reap, it was the young bishop who drove us and this gave us the opportunity to talk for several hours. He has really brought the diocese to life. Keen to show the social concern of the Gospel, right beside his home he has built a centre for handicapped children. He has also made great efforts to stimulate cultural activities. It is thanks to his efforts that the young people are once again learning classical dance.

The principle reason behind this visit to Cambodia was an invitation to help provide an experience of contemplation for lay people working in the diocese of Kompong Cham. There have been no contemplative communities in the diocese since 1970. At the same time, pagodas and Buddhist monasteries are multiplying. The place chosen for this experience was K'dol Leu, a small village on the Mekong. I had been there three times before, but never at this time of year. It was a truly amazing experience. We travelled by motorbike early on the Sunday morning, village after village, pagoda after pagoda – their gold pillars sparkling in the sunshine – a mosque, then the boat to cross the river and finally the village with its houses along the banks of the Mekong, huts on piles because of the monsoon floods. Everything was very simple, rudimentary even; no electricity, and water from the Mekong for washing. A little group of women from the village did the cooking on an open-air wood fire. There were young people who helped, too. The church too is a house on piles; beautiful with its brown wood; two windows looking out onto the river and abundant vegetation because of the rains; masses of flowers for decorating the chapel. There were over twenty of us and for nearly everyone this was the first experience of retreat and silence. They were either full-time catechists or else they work in the fields and lead one of the diocesan committees. It was a challenge to do a meeting like this but I could feel that we understood one another and that people responded well to the Bible images that were presented. All of them were young during the years of Pol Pot and the Vietnamese occupation. In some respects, they have always been like slaves, but here they realised that they exist, that God is not someone whose favours we have to deserve but who loves us first. Slowly, their faces changed, relaxed and several said, "I don't know what to say but I'm happy." The final evening, the entire community was invited: a multitude of children, mothers, and men just back from work filled the church to overflowing for a very festive prayer.

England

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me..."

Craig writes from Liverpool:

'I am Zandile Ndlovu, and I'm a child of God.' A Zimbabwean asylum-seeker wrote this message in our visitors' book after staying overnight with us recently. It is an extraordinary statement of faith, because she has certainly not been treated like a child of God. Since her arrival in Britain, she has been held in a detention centre, then made homeless and destitute, despite being heavily pregnant. After travelling to London to claim asylum, she was told to go to Liverpool to apply for accommodation. When she called us she had just been turned away again, with nowhere to sleep that night and no idea where to go next.

I live in a small Christian community called Woolman House, inspired by the life and writings of the 18th Century Quaker John Woolman. We are one single person and a married couple, plus a small baby and one very lively (and sleepless) toddler. We live together in a large house in inner-city Liverpool, and offer hospitality to asylum-seekers who are destitute or in need of short-term accommodation. We also support a group of volunteers who visit asylum-seekers in Liverpool Prison.

For me, reading Zandile's message was a powerful reminder of why we invite asylum-seekers into our home. The refugees who stay with us bring us a word of prophecy. By the simple acts of sharing our meals and playing with our children, they remind us that they too are children of God and our own brothers and sisters.

In Matthew's Gospel the 'Son of Man' says, 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me... whatever you did to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:35,40). It used to puzzle me that Christ could be so identified with poor and outcast people. But I have recognised Christ in the strangers we have welcomed. It is not because they are perfect, but because each person, with their own hopes and anxieties, is just like us. As they join in games of imagination with our daughter, or share stories of their own families the huge barriers of wealth, status, and religi that separate us crumble away, and the de unity of the family of God is revealed.

Through this Christ is speaking to us, t challenge our own comfort with a social system that needs to brutalise and humiliate our brothers and sisters in order to protect our own standard of living. We have tried to respond by simplifying our own lives, reducing our hours of paid work, and making space in our home for the exile and the stranger.

Letter from Taizé

Annual subscription
Ordinary subscription: 6 (France 4,5) Euros
Supporting subscription: 10 or 20 Euros

Means of payment:

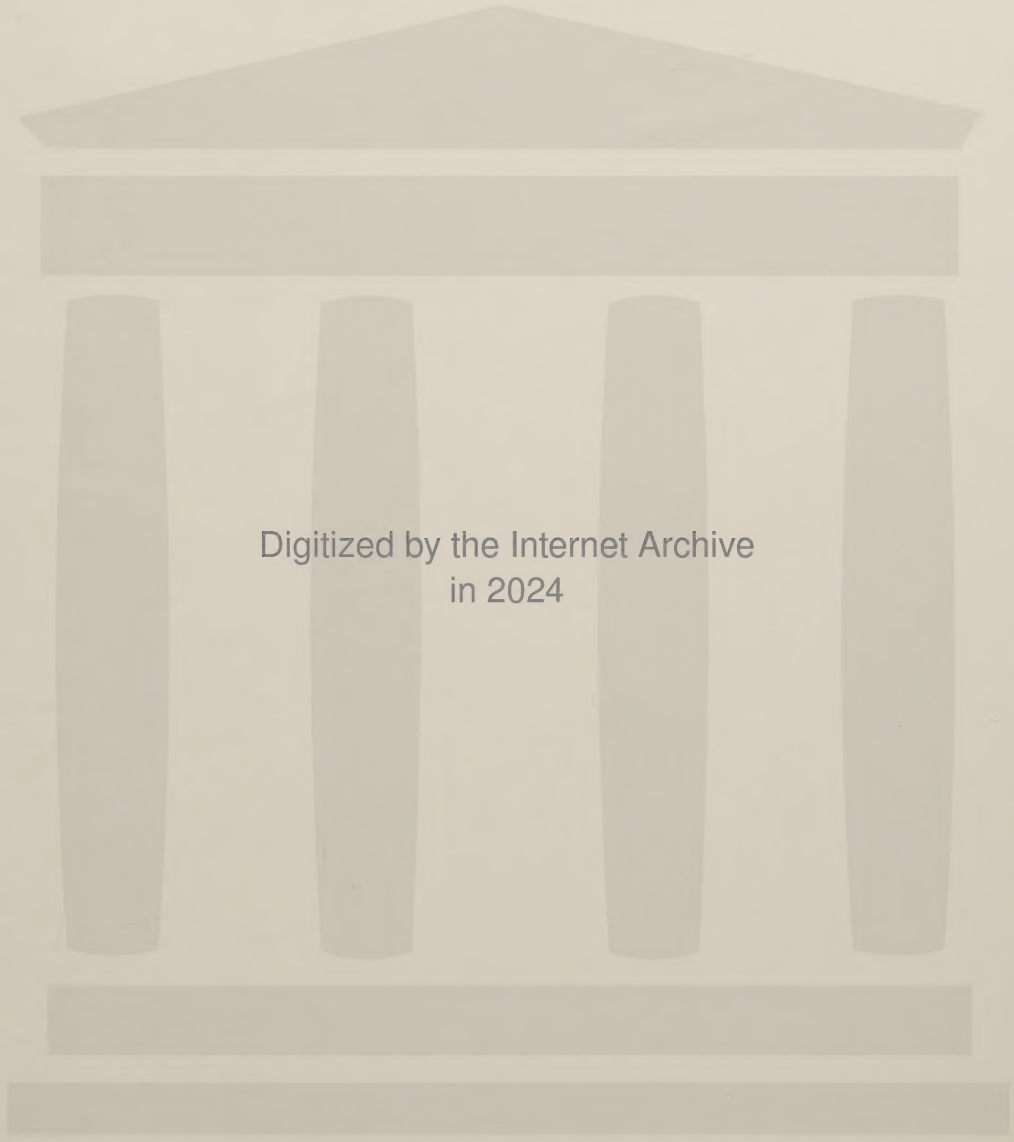
- by **credit card** *Visa, Mastercard, Eurocard, Carte Bleue*: send the number of your card and dates of validity to Taizé, and say what sum in Euros you wish to transfer.
- by **international Giro transfer** in Euros addressed to: Lettre de Taizé, CCP 20041-01007 -0061446M038-71 or CCP LYON 614 46 M.
- by **cheque** in Euros to Lettre de Taizé, F-71250 Taizé Communauté, made payable through Société Générale.

In certain countries it is possible to pay **within the country**:
Australia: $12 - Letter from Taizé, P.O. Box 769, North Sydney, NSW 2059
Canada: $10 Letter from Taizé, c/o Lesley Santiago, 145 College Circle, Ottawa, Ontario, K1K 4S1.
New Zealand: $15 - c/o Jenny Chisholm, 13 Arden Way, Wilton, Wellington.
UK: £4.50 - Letter from Taizé, c/o Nick and Jane SHIELDS, 42 Blenheim Road, St Johns, WAKEFIELD, W. Yorkshire WF1 3JZ.
USA: $7 - Letter from Taizé, c/o Bruder, P.O. Box 1954, Lenox, MA 01240.
For Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden, write to Taizé to ask for the address in your country.

Asia: The Letter from Taizé can also be obtained in the following Asian countries. Contributions towards the cost of photocopying and postage will be most welcome.
India: Letter from Taizé, c/o Brothers of Holy Cross, 47, St Mark's Road, Bangalore 560 001.
Korea: English edition. Ordinary Subscription: 2,000 Supporting Subscription: 4,000 to: Letter from Taizé, c/o Hwa Gok Dong 105-51, Kang Seo Ku, Seoul 157-010.
Philippines: Letter from Taizé, c/o 28 San Antonio Street, San Francisco Del Monte, Quezon City.
Bangladesh: Letter from Taizé, P O Box 48, H.P.O. 2200, Mymensingh.
Cambodia: Fr. Sri Pramong Virachai, BP 123 Phnom Penh.
Hong Kong: Ingrid Chan, Flat H, 14/F, Tower 125, 11 Po Yan Street, Sheung Wan.
Indonesia: Sister Be Kien Nio, Biarawati Ursulin, Jln Anggrek 60, Bandung 40114.
Japan: Isao Uematsu, c/o Yoda, 6-43-5 Shimoshakujii, Nerima-ku, Tokyo 177-0042.
Malaysia: Tiong Marcella Lee, No 33 Lot 201, Jalan Sg Maong Bahru, 93150 Kuching, Sarawak.
Pakistan: Yaqub Sadeq, Catholic Church, Toba Tek Singh.
Singapore: Angela Lee, 79 King's Road, 268141.
Sri Lanka: Martin Costa, 31 Major Lalaka Fernando Mawatha, Kapuwatte Ja-Ela.
Taiwan: Anna Tang, Aurora Center, N° 9, Lane 71, Hang Chow S. Road, Sec. 1, Taipei, ROC.
Thailand: CYO, 122/6-7 Soi Naksuwan, Nonsee Road, Yannawa, Bangkok 10120.

Correspondence: Letter from Taizé,
71250 Taizé-Communauté, France
e-mail: letter@taize.fr www.taize.fr
News from Taizé by email twice a month free of charge: www.taize.fr/taizenews.htm

Lettre 233 – DRA V. Rogeaux – Com. par. 0105K79608 – DL 994
Ateliers et Presses de Taizé



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

https://archive.org/details/letter-from-taize_december-2003-january-2004